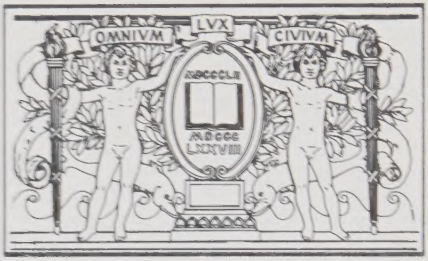


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# The Lectures of Bret Harte

BRET HARTE AS A LECTURER

# The Lectures of Bret Harte

Compiled from various sources

*To which is added*
"The Piracy of Bret Harte's Fables"

*By*
Charles Meeker Kozlay

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# PREFACE.

WHILE searching for material relative to Bret Harte I came across, from time to time, fragments of the lectures of that popular American humorist and writer. These fragments suggested to me the possibility of bringing the complete lectures together in enduring book form, an undertaking which had, because of its extreme difficulty, never before been attempted. This little book, containing Harte's two lectures: "The Argonauts of '49," and "American Humor," and in addition, the "Reply to 'Toast to Literature,'" is the result of my work along this line. To the lectures I have added an article entitled, "The Piracy of Bret Harte's Fables" giving, as its name implies, the history of the piracy of these three little parodies on Æsop's work, and needing, I believe, no further comment here. The Fables themselves have been pictured, especially for this edition, by the well-known illustrator, MERLE JOHNSON.

I have attempted to give the lectures in full, an arduous undertaking, requiring compilation from innumerable sources; the newspaper accounts of the lectures giving only those parts

which had most impressed the reporter. The lectures printed are the only two that Harte delivered; in fact, although "The Argonauts of '49" may be remembered by some the lecture on "American Humor" will probably be a surprise to many, Harte having here ventured from the field to which he had previously confined himself.

As a lecturer, Bret Harte was no more successful than some of our other noted American writers who, like him, attempted this line of work. Tall and slender, a gentleman of distinguished bearing, his first appearance was a disappointment to many who had expected to see a typical Californian in dress and manner. His demeanor was quiet and his voice hardly strong enough to fill some of the halls in which he spoke. Harte was no orator; he lacked dramatic action and expression, his gestures were few and seldom used. The truth is he was without enthusiasm, his heart not being in this work because it was distasteful to him. He had been lured to the lecture platform by the glittering offers advanced from many quarters.

Yet his lectures, though possessing neither the style nor elaboration of his writings, per-

fectly embody in the case of "The Argonauts of '49," the poetry and significance of the wonderful era portrayed. The descriptive passages are strong and finely relieved by selections from the inexhaustible wealth of stories and epigrams which Harte possessed. Almost everywhere his large audiences gave unequivocal signs of a decided appreciation and thorough enjoyment of the lectures, and although, because of poor management, the lectures in some cases were a financial disappointment, they were none the less well received and worthy of preservation.

C. M. K.

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The Argonauts of '49

# The Argonauts of '49

## California's Golden Age

Lecture by BRET HARTE, delivered in the Martin Opera House, Albany, N. Y., Dec. 3, 1872; Tremont Temple, Boston, Mass., Dec. 13, 1872; Steinway Hall, New York, Dec. 16, 1872; Lincoln Hall, Washington, D. C., Jan. 7, 1873; Library Hall, Pittsburg, Pa., Jan. 9, 1873; Ottawa and Montreal, Canada, March, 1873; Mercantile Library Hall, St. Louis, Mo., Oct. 17, 1873; Topeka, Atchison, Lawrence, Kansas City, Kan., October, 1873; London, England, January, 1879, and June, 1880, and in other places. Compiled from various sources.

I REGARD the story of the Argonauts of '49 as an episode in American life as quaint as that of the Greek adventurers; a kind of crusade without a cross, an exodus without a prophet. It is not a pretty story; perhaps it is not even instructive; it is of a life of which perhaps the best that can be said is that it exists no longer.

For more than three hundred years California was of all Christian countries the least known. It was set down on old English maps as a very strange locality, and in one instance was named as an *island!* The history of its discovery was wrapped in Spanish tradition. One Spanish

discoverer reported that he found it on a voyage from the Pacific to Lake Superior, where he found a Yankee vessel from Boston, whose captain informed him that he had come there from the Atlantic only a few days before.

Along the long line of centuries the old freebooters had cruised along its shores and captured their booty and plunder. Only quite recently a band of gold diggers came upon a large piece of wax in the broken ribs of a rotten ship. California heard and was at once fired with the discovery, and in a few weeks they were searching the ruins for the lost treasure of the Phillippine galleon. At last they found a few cutlasses with the British broad-arrow on their blades. These only showed that the enterprising and gallant Sir Francis Drake had been there before them.

Do Americans ever think that they owe to the Catholic Church and the Morman brotherhood their rights to California? Yet Father Junipero Serra, ringing his bell in the heathen-wilderness of Upper Cailfornia, and Brigham Young, leading his half-famished legions to Salt Lake, were the two great pioneers of the Argonauts of '49.

The first comes to us toiling over a Southern plain, an old man, weak, emaciated, friendless

and alone. He has left his muleteers and acolytes a league behind him, and has wandered on without scrip or wallet, bearing only a crucifix and bell. It is a characteristic plain—one that your tourists do not penetrate—scorched yet bleak, windswept, blasted, baked to its very foundations, and cracked into gaping chasms. As the pitiless sun goes down, the old man staggers forward and falls utterly exhausted. He lies there all night. Towards morning he is found by some Indians—a feeble, simple race—who in uncouth kindness offer him food and drink. But before he accepts either he rises to his knees, and there says matins and baptizes them in the Catholic faith. And then it occurs to him to ask them where he is, and he finds that he has penetrated into the unknown land. It was Padre Junipero Serra; and the sun rose that morning on Christian California. Weighed by the usual estimate of success his mission was a failure. The heathen stole his provisions and massacred his acolytes. It is said that the good fathers themselves confounded baptism and bondage and laid the foundation of *peonage;* but in the blood-stained and tear-blotted chronicle of the early California there is not a more heroic figure than this travel-

worn, self-centered, self-denying Franciscan friar.

All the western emigration that prior to the gold discoveries penetrated the Oregon and California valleys and half Americanized the coast, would have perished by the way but for the providentially created oasis of Salt Lake City. The halting teams of alkali-poisoned oxen, the footsore and despairing teamsters, gathered rest and succor from the Mormon settlement. The British frigate that sailed into the port of Monterey a day too late, saw the American flag that had crossed the continent flying from the cross of the Cathedral! A day sooner and an Englishman might have been telling you this story.

Those were peaceful, pastoral days for California, when the Angelus bells rang out peacefully and summoned the good people to prayers and sleep before 9 o'clock every night. On the plains simple *rancheros* led peaceful lives, wax tapers burned in all the cities, and on the hills the Indians roamed, dressed neatly but not expensively—in mud. They were happy tranquil days.

But a political and social earthquake more powerful than any physical convulsion ever known shook the foundation of the land, and in the disrupted strata the favorite treasure

SAN FRANCISCO IN 1849, AFTER THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD

suddenly glittered before their eyes. Then a change, which had been strengthened by a chain of circumstances, came upon them suddenly. It was not the finding of a few grains of gold, but that for years the way had been slowly opening and the doors unlocking for the people who were to profit by the discovery.

These "Argonauts" were a lawless, irreligious band of men. They were given to no superstitious rites, enthused by no high ambition, and, until they saw them, skeptical even of the existance of the gold fields. Embarked in an adventure, they accepted, in a kind of calm philosophy, whatever it might bring.

"If there is no gold, what are you going to do with those sluice boxes," said a newly-arrived fortune-seeker to his friend. "They will make first-class coffins," was the reply of a man who had calculated all his chances. If they did not burn their vessels behind them, they at least left the good ship *Argo* to lie dismantled and idle at the wharf. Sailors were shipped only for the outward voyage. Nobody expected to return, even if he anticipated failure. Even failure would, by their expediency, be made to show a certain amount of success. Until recently there stood in San Francisco a house of the earlier

period whose foundations were built entirely of boxes containing plug tobacco. It was expensive, but lumber for foundations was at a tremendous premium. An Argonaut who recognized in the boatman who pulled him ashore (and charged him the modest sum of fifty dollars for the favor) a brother classmate of Oxford, asked him: "Were you not senior wrangler in the class of '43?" "Yes," said the other significantly, "but I was also stroke oar in the regatta."

At my first breakfast in a restaurant in San Francisco I was attended by a waiter who bore a strong resemblance to a person I had always admired as the model of refined good breeding. Not wishing to wound the feelings of the waiter —who carried a revolver—I inquired of the proprietor of the hotel whether he was not, in fact, a person who in the East had filled a much higher position. The landlord confirmed the suspicion, and added: "He's mighty handy, and can talk elegantly to a customer as is waiting for his cakes, and can make him forget that he is starving." I asked him if it would be possible to fill his place. "I am afraid not," said the proprietor, with a tone of suspicion, and he added, significantly, "I don't think you would suit."

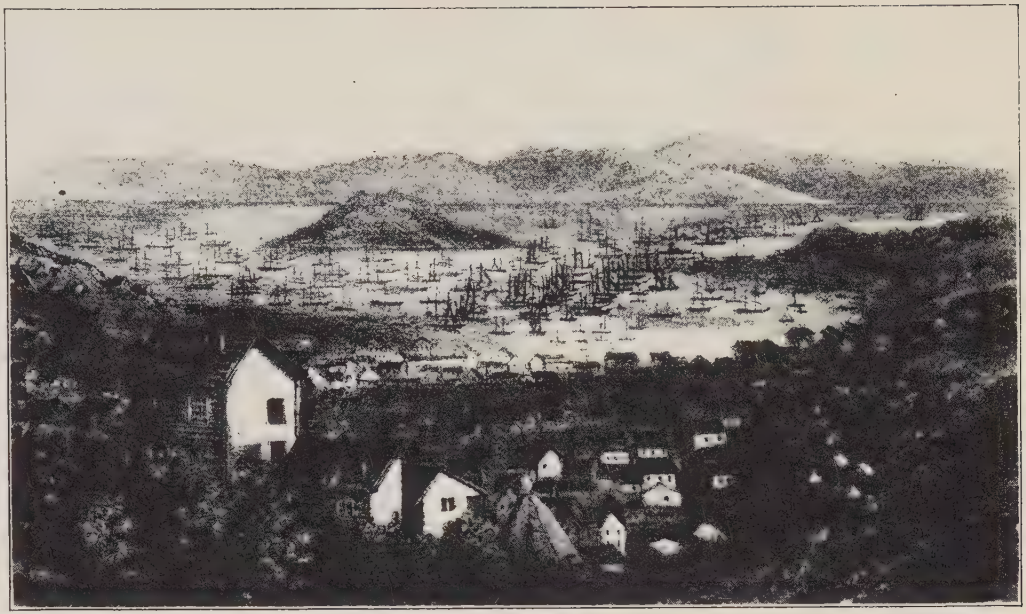
It was wonderful adaptability, perhaps the influence of the climate, that produced in them this element of success. Much of this adaptability was due to the character of the people. What that character was, perhaps it would not be well for me to say; at least I should prefer to defer criticism until I had arrived at a safe distance from the historian. In distant parts of the country they had left families, friends, and in some cases officers of justice, perplexed and bewildered. There were husbands who had deserted their own wives, and, in some extreme cases, the wives of others.

Nor was it possible to tell from their superficial exterior whether they were or were not named in this general indictment. Some of the best men had the worst record, and some of the worst rejoiced in a spotless Puritan pedigree. "The boys seem to have taken a fresh deal all around," said old John Oakhurst, "and there's no knowing whether a man will turn up jack or king." It may be said of John Oakhurst himself that he came of a family who regarded games of chance as sinful, and who had never believed that a man could be successful by them. "To think," said Mr. Oakhurst, after a game of ten minutes from which he made $5000—"to think as folks believe that keards is a waste of time."

In San Francisco in those early days everybody played. A gambler died at the table, and three doctors who happened to be there examined him and pronounced that the cause of death was disease of the heart: the coroner, who was accidentally present, empanelled a jury from the other players, who returned a verdict in accordance with the evidence and went on with the game.

I would not have it inferred that there was no respectability in morals among the people of that time; but their character grew, and the strongest was not always the best. Let me bring them nearer to you and sketch for you two pictures—one in their city by the sea and one in their little cabins in the camps of the Sierras.

In the San Francisco of 1852 flour was worth $50. a barrel, and a glimpse of a woman's face was one of the comforts for which the hardy adventurers sighed. The gambling saloon was the central point of interest in the history of the Argonauts. It was approached by no mysterious passage or guarded entrance, and frequently opened from the street, with every invitation of gilding, lights and music. And yet they were the quietest halls in San Francisco: there was no drunkenness, no quarreling, scarcely an exulta-



SAN FRANCISCO IN 1849, AFTER THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD

tion or disappointment. Business men who had gambled all day in other enterprises found nothing here to unduly excite them, and in the intervals of music a beautiful calm pervaded the room. People moved around noiselessly from table to table as if fortune were nervous as well as fickle. A cane falling upon the floor caused everyone to look up, and a loud laugh excited indignation. There was a Western man who, having made a few thousands in the mines, came to San Francisco to take a steamer home. On the night before he was to sail he entered the Argo saloon, seated himself at the table in sheer listlessness, staked $20. and won. He won again. In two hours he won a fortune. An hour later he rose from the table a ruined man. The steamer sailed without him. He was a simple man, knowing little of the world, and the sudden winning and losing of a fortune crazed him.

He went again to his work and regularly took his seat at the table and spent the earnings he had saved. So a year passed. If he had forgotten a waiting wife, she had not forgotten him and one evening she landed, with her child, upon the pier at San Francisco, penniless and alone. She told her story to John Oakhurst, who quietly provided for her wants. Two or three evenings

after, the Western man won some trifle, and then gained other plays in succession and it really seemed as though fortune had come again. John Oakhurst saw his joy and said: "I will give you three thousand dollars for your next deal." He hesitated. "Your wife is at the door: Will you take it?" The man accepted: but the spirit of the gambler was strong within him and, as Mr. Oakhurst fully expected, he waited to see the result of the play. Well, John Oakhurst lost, and, with a look of gratitude the man turned, aghast, seized the money and hurried away as if he feared he might be enchained by the spell which bound him.

"That was a bad spirit of your'n, Jack," said his friend. "Yes," said Jack, "but I got so tired of seeing that fellow around. It was a put-up game between the dealer and me. It is the first time," he added, with an oath—which I think the recording angel placed to his credit—"It is the first time I ever played a game that was not on the square."

The social life of that day was peculiar. The best dressed men were gamblers, and the best dressed ladies had no right to the title. Gentlemen young in years had wives much their seniors and considerably larger in their physical persons,

and often one lady had a troop of gallants to do escort duty of an evening. A married captain's wife was escorted home from a ball by every officer in the garrison, and observed that now at length she understood the meaning of the expression, "the pleasure of your company." Surely in the multiplicity of such attention there was safety, and especially so when each gentleman wore his revolver.

A wife of an old pioneer used to show a chair with a hole through the cushion made by a gentleman caller who sat down in bashful confusion and exploded his revolver.

In domestic life the highest excellence in woman was to keep a boarding-house, and to be the wife of an aristocratic Argonaut was to be able to take in washing.

When a baby cried in a theatre the people cried "encore."

Such was the refined life of the Argonauts in the city by the sea. But with a change of affairs a corresponding change took place in morals and manners, and people began to put locks on their doors, and portable property was no longer left out at night. Fine houses were built; and dealers were convicted of forgery and deceit.

California is a country unlike any other.

Nature here is rude and unfinished as the life itself. The people seem to have come here a thousand years too soon, and before the great hostess was ready to receive them. Everything is new, crude and strange. There is nothing soft, tender or pastoral in the whole landscape. Nature invites to Homerics rather than to Bucolics.

The miners in the hills lived a wilder life than their brother Argonauts of the cities. Happily, their wants were few and infrequent. They left behind with regret the chimneys of their shanties, for the simple reason that they could not carry them away with the cabins, which were made movable. For clothes his chief reliance was in the meal sack, that robed his outer after it had nourished his inner man, his track was marked with empty oyster cans, he met the native upon the common footing of beans.

It was often that the diversity of amendments to the miner's clothes were a serious perplexity to the recognition of the person wearing them. In the earlier days, two gentlemen of respectability lost their identity entirely in the labels of the flour sacks which had been added to their clothing, so that one of them came to be called "Genesee Mills" and the other "Eagle Brand."

The miners were generous to a fault. The "Sanitary" subscription, by which north and south benefited alike, was started in a California barn. "It is rough upon those poor fellows; I am sorry for them." "How much are you sorry?" "Four hundred dollars." The next man gave $1000.; in half an hour donations of $15,000. were telegraphed to Washington, and the total subscription of California was $3,000,000 gold.

The miners were, above all, faithful to their partners and loved them with a love passing women. It was dangerous to interfere in partner's quarrels. Once a stranger at a bar who had not, so far as he knew, given offense to any person present, suddenly found himself upon the floor and a tall Kentuckian standing over him with his revolver out. When the tall gentleman was courteously asked for an explanation, he said: "I ain't nothing against the stranger myself, but he said something just now against Quakers, and I want him to understand that my partner is a Quaker and a peaceful man."

The Argonauts were not prone to sentimentalisms, although they knew what homesickness was. When they dealt in sarcasm it was grim and striking. Lynch law determined that horse

stealing should be punished by death; but once a jury took several minutes after retiring to consider their verdict, perhaps from humanity, perhaps because there had, in consequence of the rigor of the law, been a great mortality among the male population. The leader of the crowd put his head into the jury room and said he did not wish to hurry the gentlemen but they wanted that room to lay out the corpse in.

From California came such, now world-wide, slang as "dry up," "played out," "take stock" and "passing in your cheques." A miner said of a forcible sermon that the preacher seemed to him "to have taken every trick." On the other hand, a teamster, blamed for his intemperate language, said: "I don't call that swearing. You should hear Bill Jones exhort the impenitent mule."

A barman, after a night in which pistol-shots had freely punctuated the village revelry, appeared in the morning with his face bound up, but with a very happy expression, and observed that the bar was new, and that it was only on the previous evening "that the boys seemed to be getting really acquainted."

The hardly musical names given by the Argonauts to places in California are fast superceding the names left there by the Spaniards as an only legacy.

The "Heathen Chinee" suffers many injuries in California but he nevertheless persistently attains his ends. He will chat affably to a custom-house officer from his seat on a chair, the hollow legs of which are stuffed with smuggled opium, and will assume the name and expression of a brother celestial to cheat the collectors of the poll-tax. In spite of the indignation of the Californian the Chinaman practices all their vices.

I once more refer to the Argonauts of '49. In the rank and file there may be many known personally to some of this audience. There may be gaps which the memory of others may supply. There are homes all through America whose vacant places can never be filled. There are graves all over California on whose nameless mounds none shall weep. I should like to end this picture with a flourish, but the trumpets and the bands have gone on before and the mountains are beginning to hide the Argonauts from our view. They are marching to the city by the sea; they are marching for the sail of the last Argo, and when the last Argonaut shall have passed in, she too will spread her white wings and slip unnoticed through the golden gate to the haven that opens in the distance.

American Humor

# American Humor

Lecture by BRET HARTE, delivered in Farwell Hall, Chicago, Ills., on December 10, 1874, and in Association Hall, New York, January 26, 1875. Compiled from various sources.

I AM aware that the magnitude of my title may seem somewhat ambitious for both performer and performance. I therefore hasten to say that I will assume at the outset that it is doubtful if there is any such thing as American humor as a nationally distinct intellectual quality. I fear, however, that I must borrow so much of that which has of late years been recognized as a form of national humor as to say that it "reminds me of a little story."

Some years ago I was riding on the box of a California stage-coach with a friend and the driver. As my fellow passenger was a man of some literary attainment our conversation fell upon some of the early English humorists. After my friend had departed, the driver, who had taken no part in the conversation, asked me: "What were you talking about, sir, that made

you laugh so much?" I informed him that the early English humorists had been the topic of conversation. "Well," said the driver, "judging by the way you laughed, I should have thought you were talking about some funny men." It was probable that my friend, the driver, occupied the position of a good many American and English writers who are inclined to accept modern extravagance, which is sufficiently characteristic of our people to be called national, as the true, genuine humor.

I will try to prove that our later American humorists are not so much purely American as they are modern; that they stand in legitimate succession to their early English brethren, and that what is called the humor of a geographical section, is only the form or method of to-day. Sir Richard Steele had he been born in the United States would have developed into a Danbury Newsman and had Bailey been born in London and educated at Temple Bar in the time of Sir Richard Steele he would have described the humorous peculiarities of London just in the manner that that humorist did. This is an epoch of curt speech, and magnetic telegraphs and independent thought, and wherever these conditions exist most powerfully humorous

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THE ARGONAUTS OF '49
Tickets 75 cents; reserved seats $1; for sale at Schirmer's, Dutton's, 114 Broadway, and at Hall.

LECTURE. — The American Lecture Bureau has the honor to announce that a lecture will be delivered in TREMONT TEMPLE, on FRIDAY EVENING of this week, Dec. 13, at 7½ o'clock, by
BRET HARTE
Subject—"The Argonauts of Forty-Nine."
Tickets, with reserved seats at 50 cents, may be obtained at the hall on and after Tuesday morning.

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BRET HARTE
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Friday Evening, Oct. 17th.
First Lecture of the season by the author of the Heathen Chinee,
MR. BRET HARTE.
Subject, "The Argonauts of '49."
His first appearance in St. Louis, inaugurating in this city the Star Lecture Course.
Vocal Voluntary at 7:40. Lecture at 8.
Admission, 75c Reserved Seats, $1.00.

BRET HARTE TO-NIGHT
"ARGONAUTS OF '49."
LINCOLN HALL

Y. M. A. Lecture Course
BRET HARTE!
Subject, The Argonauts of '49
Tuesday Evening, Dec. 8d
AT
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Single Tickets, 50 Cents.
Doors open at 7½ o'clock

Lecture at Farwell Hall, on
"American Humor."

MR. BRET HARTE will deliver his FIRST LECTURE in London (The Argonauts of '49) in AID of the FUNDS of the VICTORIA HOSPITAL for CHILDREN (under Royal and distinguished Patronage), at Steinway-hall, on Monday evening, 21st June, at 8 o'clock. Tickets, numbered and reserved 10s. 6d. and 5s; unreserved, 2s. 6d. and 1s. may be obtained at Steinway-hall, Lower Seymour-street, Portman-square; and of the Secretary, at the Hospital, Queens-road, Chelsea, S. W.

literature will be found most embarrassed by them. But the humorist remains intact; he is simply an observer. I will go further and say that it is because the humorist is intact, because he is old fashioned, because even in a republican country he is the most tremendous conservative and aristocrat—that it is because he is all this he is an observer.

Before the birth of its characteristic humor, American literature was even more ancient than contemporaneous literature in England. Even Irving tried to introduce the old fashioned style of the *Spectator* in his "Salmagundi."

I am quite ready to believe that the quick apprehension of some of my auditors will anticipate me with the suggestion that the Yankee dialect and character are the earliest expression of American humor. Unfortunately, however, for the theory of national humor, it was not a Yankee or American who first invented it or gave it a place in American literature. Even as we owe the characteristic title of Yankee to the cheap badinage of an English officer, so we are indebted to an Englishman for the first respectable figure that our Yankee cuts in American humor. It was to Judge Haliburton, of her Britannic Majesty's North American Colonies,

who first detected how much sagacity, dry humor and poetry were hidden under the grotesque cover of Sam Slick of Slickville, that the world first owed the birth of true American humor. Later on James Russell Lowell took up the work, but, at best, he only reproduced a type of life of a small section of the great American Union.

It is to the South and West that we really owe the creation and expression of that humor which is perhaps most characteristic of our lives and habits as a people. It was in the South, and among conditions of servitude and the habits of an inferior race, that there sprang up a humor and pathos as distinct, as original, as perfect and rare as any that ever flowered under the most beneficent circumstances of race and culture. It is a humor whose expression took a most ephemeral form—oral, rather than written. It abode with us, making us tolerant of a grievous wrong, and it will abide with us even when the conditions have passed away. It is singularly free from satire and unkind lines. It was simplicity itself. It touched all classes and conditions of men. Its simple pathos was recognized by the greatest English humorist that the world had known, and yet it has no place in enduring American literature. Even Topsy and Uncle

Tom are dead. They were too much imbued with a political purpose to retain their place as a humorist creation.

Yet there are a few songs that will live when ambition's characters are dead. A few years ago there lived and died—too obscurely I am afraid for our reputation as critics—a young man who, more than any other American, seemed to have caught the characteristic quality of negro pathos and humor. Perhaps posterity will be more appreciative of his worth, and future generations who think of "The Old Folks at Home" will feel some touch of kindliness for the memory of Stephen C. Foster.

Now, as we approach our contemporary humorists, let us pause for an examination of the forces which for the last twenty years have been shaping the humorous literature of the land. The character of these forces has entirely changed. The character of the press is different; all its pompous dignity and most of its acrimony are gone. The exigencies of news have stopped the stilted editorials, and the sagacious modern editor is well aware of the fact that it is a much easier and neater thing to stilleto a man with a line of solid minion than to knock him down with a column of leaded long primer.

One of the strongest points of modern journalism is its humorous local sallies. A young man, graduated perhaps from the case, writes humorous items in the local column of his paper, which are read more and are better appreciated than all the rest of it, and the readers wonder who the rising humorist is who has appeared among them.

Brevity especially is the soul of California wit. For instance, the reply of "you bet," made by a San Francisco burglar to the "you get" of the householder who held a cocked "six-shooter" at his head. I might also add here the story of a notorious Californian gambler. During the funeral service the hearse-horses became restive and started off prematurely with the rest of the mourners in pursuit. When the horses had been stopped and the last sad rites were concluded, the friends of the deceased wrote his widow a letter acquainting her with the fact that they had given her dead husband a good send-off, and that although the unpleasant occurrence, which they described, somewhat marred the solemnity of the occasion, it gave them a melancholy satisfaction to inform her that "the corpse won." This illustrates the humorous but irreverent style in which California newspaper men described events of the most serious nature.

If we are to take the criticisms of our English friends, American humor has at last blossomed on the dry stalk of our national life, and Artemus Ward is its perfect flower. Personally, I fear there is a want of purpose in him. He never leads and is always on a line of popular sentiment or satire. The form of his spelling is purely mechanical. He gives the half-humorist slang of the people, the kind of expressions used in the stage-coach, the railway carriage, the bar-room, or the village tap. If he did not gather, he at least gave public voice to them. He contributes no single figure to American literature but his own character of showman, and it is very doubtful if even that figure, respectable as it is, bears any real resemblance to any known American type.

The Civil War, which found him in the summit of his popularity, did not help him to any better results. To his nature the War was only an unpleasant and unnecessary bother. In fact during this time his genius seems to have left him and fallen upon Orpheus C. Kerr and Petroleum V. Nasby, whose pictures of South-western life are unequaled for force and fidelity. Artemus Ward had the good-fellow humor of the story-teller, to whom a sympathizing audi-

ence and an absence of any moral questioning were essential to success. His success in England was a surprise to even his most ardent admirers. The personality of the man as a lecturer had much to do with his reception in England. He captivated average Englishmen by his cool disregard of them, his quiet audacity, and his complete ignoring of the traditions of the lecture-room. He wrote to me to say that the first night of his appearance it was a toss-up whether he would be arrested after the lecture or invited to dinner.

It would be hardly fair to look too closely into the secret of his popularity in England, yet if they were to settle the question of American humor, perhaps it would be well if we did. It was after the war. Englishmen were inclined to be friendly, and their good feeling had taken the form which their good feeling takes toward everything that is not British—condescending patronage. Criticism was blandly waived. Ward made many personal friends, and he was followed to his grave in Kensal Green by some of the most distinguished men in the country.

To-day, among our latest American humorists, such as Josh Billings, "The Danbury Newsman" and Opheus C. Kerr, Mark Twain stands alone

as the most original humorist that America has yet produced. He alone is inimitable. Our line of humorists, it may be remarked, is a long one, but we cannot spare any of them yet. We need not however lessen our admiration for Lowell, Holmes, Irving or Curtis. I do not think a perusal of "Innocents Abroad" would endanger the security of the "Sketch Book." Perhaps, after all, there was a little too much fun. Laughter makes us doubly serious afterward, and we do not want to be humorists always, turning up like a prize-fighter at each round, still smiling.

If anything, the Americans are too prone to laugh, even over their misfortunes: they must not be serious no matter how grave the occasion. I will relate a story which is a good instance of this.

Some years ago, while riding alone through the Sierras, I lost my way. Suddenly I came across a dark-browed, heavily-armed, suspicious-looking stranger, whom I would have avoided if possible, but as that was not to be done, I approached him and asked him the road to camp. The heavily-armed stranger guided me to the spot, and beguiled the road with one or two very amusing stories, one of which he had just begun

when the cross-road leading to the camp came into view. My guide accompanied me in order to finish his story, which was extremely humorous in its nature, to within a short distance of the camp, and then departed. On arriving among my friends I was astonished to find a sheriff's posse was on hand in search of a noted desperado, whose description furnished by them identified him undoubtedly with the man who had, in order to finish his story, placed himself within one hundred yards of his deadly enemies.

Such was the American extreme. Perhaps our true humorist is yet to come: when he does come he will show that a nation which laughs so easily has still a great capacity for deep feeling, and he will, I think, be a little more serious than our present day humorists.

# Reply to "Toast to Literature"

# Reply to "Toast to Literature" at the Royal Academy

On Saturday evening, May 1, 1880, to inaugurate the exhibition which opened that day, the President and Council of the Royal Academy gave the accustomed entertainment, at Burlington House, to a distinguished company, including His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge, and other members of the Royal Family; Her Majesty's Ministers, many of the ex-Ministers, foreign Ambassadors, Members of both Houses of Parliament, and other gentlemen of position and influence.

Sir FREDERICK LEIGHTON, the President, said: "I have now to ask you to drink to the interest of Science and Literature. *** In coupling a name with Literature I propose to take a rather unusual course: for I shall call upon a writer who owes us no allegiance save that of friendship to the country in which he is now a guest. [Cheers.] An English writer, nevertheless, for English is the tongue in which he delights the innumerable host of his readers; English is the tongue in which he has clothed a humor, racy and delicate at once, and has married to it a most subtle pathos—a pathos so deep, so tender, and so penetrating that we rise from his pages half believing that wrong is an untoward accident in the world, and goodness the one abiding, inextinguishable thing. [Cheers.] This company will be glad, I am confident, of the opportunity thus offered to it of welcoming in its midst the great American humorist, BRET HARTE. [Loud cheers.]

I PRESUME I am selected to answer to this toast as a native of a country which reads more English books and pays less for them than any other nation. [Laughter.] Certainly, representing as I do a free people—who of their

own accord read four volumes of Tennyson to one of Longfellow, [laughter] I might claim a hearing here. [Laughter.] But I recognize in your kindly greeting the same welcome extended to Hosea Biglow, Hans Breitmann, Artemus Ward, and Mark Twain. [Cheers.] I recognize your appreciation of what is said to be distinctive American literature—a literature that laughs with the American skies, and is by turns as surprising and as extravagant as the American weather. [Laughter.] Indeed, I am not certain that these cyclones of American humor that cross the Atlantic are not as providential as the American storms that mitigate the austere monotony of the English climate. [Laughter.] For it has been settled by your reviewers that American literature is American humor, and that this American humor is a kind of laughable impropriety, more or less scantily clothed in words. It has been settled that you are a sober people, and that nobody in America takes life seriously —not even a highwayman—and that our literature is a reflex of our life. But I think that a majority of this Academy are kind enough to recognize some principles of Art underlying this characteristic. And I consider that no higher

BRET HARTE

CARTOON BY "SPY" (LESLIE WARD) IN *VANITY FAIR*, 1879

compliment has been paid American humor than that the type of American drawn by your greatest English humorist has been supplanted by types drawn by Lowell, Artemus Ward, and Mark Twain.

[Mr. Bret Harte concluded by thanking the President for the toast.]

# The Improved Æsop

## For Intelligent Modern Children

By Bret Harte

# Fable I

## *The Fox and the Grapes*

A thirsty fox one day, in passing through a vineyard, noticed that the grapes were hanging in clusters from vines which were trained to such a height as to be out of his reach.

"Ah," said the fox, with a supercilious smile, "I've heard of this before. In the twelfth century an ordinary fox of average culture would have wasted his energy and strength in the vain attempt to reach yonder sour grapes. Thanks to my knowledge of vine culture, however, I at once observe that the great height and extent of the vine, the drain upon the sap through the increased number of tendrils and leaves must, of necessity, impoverish the grape, and render it unworthy the consideration of an intelligent animal. Not any for me thank you." With these words he coughed slightly, and withdrew.

MORAL—This fable teaches us that an intelligent discretion and some botanical knowledge are of the greatest importance in grape culture.

SAN FRANCISCO AS IT APPEARED IN NOVEMBER, 1848

# Fable II

## *The Fox and the Stork*

A fox one day invited a stork to dinner, but provided for the entertainment only the first course, soup. This being in a shallow dish, of course the fox lapped up readily, but the stork, by means of his long bill, was unable to gain a mouthful.

"You do not seem fond of soup," said the fox, concealing a smile in his napkin. "Now it is one of my greatest weaknesses."

"You certainly seem to project yourself outside of a large quantity," said the stork, rising with some dignity, and examining his watch with considerable *empressement;* "but I have an appointment at eight o'clock, which I had forgotten. I must ask to be excused. *Au revoir.* By the way, dine with me to-morrow."

The fox assented, arrived at the appointed time, but found, as he fully expected, nothing on the table but a single long-necked bottle, containing olives, which the stork was complacently extracting by the aid of his long bill.

"Why, you do not seem to eat anything," said the stork, with great naïvetté, when he had finished the bottle.

"No," said the fox, significantly, "I am waiting for the second course."

"What is that?" asked the stork, blandly.

"Stork, stuffed with olives," shrieked the fox in a very pronounced manner, and instantly dispatched him.

MORAL—True hospitality obliges the host to sacrifice himself for his guests.

# Fable III

## *The Wolf and the Lamb*

A wolf one day, drinking from a running stream, observed a lamb also drinking from the same stream at some distance from him.

"I have yet to learn," said the wolf, addressing the lamb with dignified severity, "what right you have to muddy the stream from which I am drinking."

"Your premises are incorrect," replied the lamb with bland politeness, "for if you will take the trouble to examine the current critically you will observe that it flows from you to me, and that any disturbance of sediment here would be, so far as you are concerned, entirely local."

"Possibly you are right," returned the wolf, "but, if I am not mistaken, you are the person who, two years ago, used some influence against me at the primaries."

"Impossible," replied the lamb; "two years ago I was not born."

"Ah! well," added the wolf, composedly, "I am wrong again. But it must convince every intelligent person who has listened to this conversation that I am altogether insane, and consequently not responsible for my actions."

With this remark, he at once dispatched the lamb, and was triumphantly acquitted.

MORAL.—This fable teaches us how erroneous may be the popular impression in regard to the distribution of alluvium and the formation of river deltas.

# The Piracy of Bret Harte's Fables

# The Piracy of Bret Harte's Fables

THAT Bret Harte ever essayed to emulate the example of immortal Æsop is not generally known, even among those who are fairly familiar with his work. It is certain, however, that he wrote and published at least three fables. And, what is more, it is equally certain that these inoffensive and not very ambitious ventures into a difficult literary field, brought him an experience humorous to look back upon, but which must have been exasperating at the time.

He was charged with "literary piracy." At first glance the charge seemed not without foundation. The humor of the situation develops however, when it becomes evident that Harte was not only innocent of flying the literary Black Flag, but was himself the victim of piratical enterprise. The three fables were not stolen *by* him but *from* him.

In the columns of the *New York Tribune*, early in the year 1882, there appeared the following arraignment:

### IS THIS A CASE OF PIRACY?

*To the Editor of The Tribune:*

SIR:—I notice in your paper of to-day an article copied from *The London Echo* headed, "Bret Harte's New Book — A Collection of Fables." Of the five, four have been stolen *verbatim et literatim* from my volumes, "Out of the World," published five years ago and favorably noticed in *The Tribune*, if I mistake not, and the fifth has been expanded and spoiled. Mr. Harte seems to have gone to the length of appropriating the illustrations of my friend, Mr. F. E. Church. I have heard of wholesale literary piracies, but there is a sweet, luscious largeness about Mr. Harte's work which reminds one of nothing so much as a mammoth California fruit, ripened in an English hothouse. Yours truly,

G. T. LANIGAN.

New York, Jan. 8, 1882.

The newspaper article to which Mr. Lanigan refers was a reprint by the *New York Tribune* of a book review first published in the *London Echo*. The work under review was called "Bret Harte's New Book," and the publishers neglected to state that only a part of the book's contents was from the pen of Bret Harte. The reviewer said:

"Mr. Bret Harte has gone to the author, whom that popular lecturer, the Rev. Jackson Wray, aptly describes as "Rare Old Æsop," and has produced a new book of Fables whose chief fault is that it is so small, but though the volume is thin the fun is not so by any means."

After particularizing concerning certain of the fables, not choosing, as it happened, any of the genuine Harte products, the reviewer continued: "Some of the fables in the book seem to have been written with an eye to passing events. Take, for instance, the following and read it in connection with the extraordinary incidents of the trial of Guiteau." Then follows "The Wolf and the Lamb," which was one of the fables that Harte really did write.

Bret Harte's state of mind upon having his attention called to Mr. Lanigan's accusation may be better imagined when his opinion as to the piracy of an author's writings is more clearly known.

In the early days of Harte's career as an author there was no international copyright law, and many English publishers reaped a rich harvest by placing on the market the writings of

American authors. And I may remark in passing—with shame for my fellow-countrymen,—the pirates were not all on the other side of the Atlantic, for not a few American publishers took advantage of opportunities to make money in this manner. Harte, like many other American authors, was a sufferer from this abuse.

His attitude toward the flagrant piracy by English publishers was shown when in 1873 he brought suit, through his American publishers, for an injunction to restrain the importation and sale of pirated editions of his works. The articles in question were published in *The Overland Monthly* and other magazines. The injunction was sustained, and the books then in the custom house were not allowed to enter here.

The following characteristic letter of Mark Twain will serve to make clearer a contemporary author's feelings on the subject. I give the letter in full because it contains much of Twain's humor and has never before, so far as I am able to learn, been published in book form.

*To the Editor of The Spectator:*

SIR:—I only venture to intrude upon you because I come, in some sense, in the interest of public morality, and this makes my mission res-

pectable. Mr. John Camden Hotten, of London, has, of his own individual motion, republished several of my books in England. I do not protest against this, for there is no law that could give effect to the protest; and, besides, publishers are not accountable to the laws of heaven and earth in any country, as I understand it. But my grievance is this: My books are bad enough just as they are written, then what must they be after Mr. John Camden Hotten has composed half-a-dozen chapters and added the same to them? I feel that all true hearts will bleed for an author whose volumes have fallen under such a dispensation as this. If a friend of yours, or even if you yourself, were to write a book and send it adrift among the people, with the gravest apprehensions that it was not up to what it ought to be intellectually, how would you like to have John Camden Hotten sit down and stimulate his powers, and drool two or three original chapters on to the end of that book? Would not the world seem cold and hollow to you? Would you not feel that you wanted to die and be at rest? Little the world knows of true suffering. And suppose he should entitle these chapters, "Holiiday Literature," "True Stories of Chicago," "On Children," "Train Up a Child, and Away He Goes," and "Vengeance," and then, on the strength of having evolved these marvels from his own consciousness, go and "Copyright" the entire book, and put on the title-page a picture

of a man with his hand in another man's pocket and the legend "All Rights Reserved," (I only suppose the picture; still it would be rather a neat thing). And, further, suppose that in the kindness of his heart and the exuberance of his untaught fancy, this thoroughly well-meaning innocent should expunge the modest title which you had given your book, and replace it with so foul an invention as this, "Screamers and Eye-Openers," and went and got *that* copyrighted, too. And suppose that on top of all this, he continually and persistently forgot to offer you a single penny or even send you a copy of your mutilated book to burn. Let us suppose all this. Let him suppose it with strength enough, and then he will know something about woe. Sometimes when I read one of those additional chapters constructed by John Camden Hotten, I feel as if I wanted to take a broom-straw and go and knock that man's brains out. Not in anger, for I feel none. Oh! not in anger; but only to see, that is all. Mere idle curiosity. And Mr. Hotten says that one *nom de plume* of mine is "Carl Byng." I hold that there is no affliction in this world that makes a man feel so downtrodden and abused as the giving him a name that does not belong to him. How would this sinful aborigine feel if I were to call him John Camden Hottentot, and come out in the papers and say he was entitled to it by divine right? I do honestly believe it would throw

him into a brain fever, if there were not an insuperable obstacle in the way.

Yes—to come to the original subject, which is the sorrow that is slowly but surely undermining my health—Mr. Hotten prints unrevised, uncorrected, and in some respects, spurious books, with my name to them as author, and thus embitters his customers against one of the most innocent of men. Messrs. George Routledge and Sons are the only English publishers who pay me any copyright, and therefore if my books are to disseminate either suffering or crime among the readers of our language, I would ever so much rather they did it through that house, and then I could contemplate the spectacle calmly as the dividends came in.

I am sir, etc.,

SAMUEL T. CLEMENS ("Mark Twain").

London, September 20, 1872.

Bret Harte, though in Glasgow at the time Mr. Lanigan's accusation was printed in the *New York Tribune,* immediately made reply to the same through the columns of that paper. Mr. Lanigan we hope considered the answer sufficiently full and explicit.

*To the Editor of the Tribune:*

SIR:—I find in the columns of *The Tribune* a communication from a Mr. Lanigan claiming the

authorship of certain fables contained in a book published in London, bearing upon its cover the inscription, "Fables by G. Washington Æsop" and upon its title page, "Fables by G. Washington Æsop and Bret Harte." Three of these fables I recognize as my own, but where and when written I cannot now recall.

As Mr. Lanigan has seen fit to abuse me for instigating the publication of the book, and claiming its authorship, it may be necessary for me to state that I neither authorized its publication nor knew of its existence until it was publicly sold. When I read it, I wrote the publisher, who apologized, but at the same time pointed out the obvious fact—which seems to have escaped the attention of Mr. Lanigan—that he had, neither on title page or cover, claimed the work as wholly mine. And it is only just to him to say he admitted a certain wrong done to me, in so far as to *voluntarily* offer to "consider" any pecuniary damage I might have sustained. That damage I am not "considering" here. But if I have been wantonly or accidentally used as an advertisement for a book, which is amusing, I do not see that it follows that I should suffer myself to be made an advertisement for Mr. Lanigan, who is certainly not.

BRET HARTE.

Glasgow, Jan. 28, 1882.

Bret Harte says in this letter that he cannot recall when and where he wrote the fables, but

some may remember the Homœopathic Hospital Fair, held in the hall at 112 to 116 Lake Street, Chicago, November 19–26, 1874, and Harte's contribution to "The Chicago Hospital Bazaar," published in the interests of the Fair at that time. It was here his three fables first appeared. The reason for their not being more widely known, and inserted by the publishers in his collected works, may perhaps be that, coming through the channels in which they did, they escaped notice. They are certainly, as a reading will show, well worthy of preservation.

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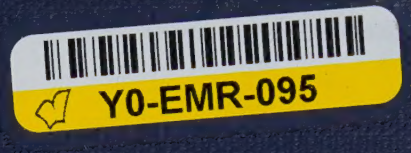
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